

The Jumonville Affair

By

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Translated and abridged by Donald H. Kent
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AS HISTORICAL method improves, and as access to archives becomes easier, the need is felt for a re-study of certain disputed questions. With some of these questions this need is most urgent, for in certain quarters they have been treated with a complete lack of impartiality, and the conclusions thus reached continue to appear in textbooks or have been adopted without change by uncritical historians. The Jumonville affair is one of these.

This subject has been mishandled by a French Canadian historian,¹ but if an American historian should tell a Canadian, "You are on Jumonville's side," the Canadian if he liked this game could always retort, "You are on Washington's," and history would be no further ahead. Therefore, it is proper that a French Canadian should study this problem anew, profiting by the experience of his predecessors, and guarding against falling into the

*Originally, a paper presented at the meeting of the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française, April 17, 1952, published in the *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, Vol. VI, No. 3 (December, 1952), pages 331-373. Dr. Marcel Trudel is professor of the History of Canada at Laval University, and author of numerous works, including *Le Régime militaire dans le Gouvernement des Trois-Rivières* and *Louis XVI, le Congrès américain et le Canada, 1774-1789*. In granting permission for publication in *Pennsylvania History*, Dr. Trudel gave the translator "a blank check" for any abridgement that might be necessary. The major deletions are noted below.

¹[This alludes to Abbé Georges Robitaille, *Washington et Jumonville, étude critique* (Montreal, Le Devoir, 1933). This so-called "critical study" attempting to prove Washington's guilt in the "assassination" of Jumonville made little use of original sources. In fact, for his account of the Jumonville skirmish, Robitaille merely gave a passage from Bernard Fay, *George Washington, Republican Aristocrat* (N. Y., Houghton Mifflin, 1931), and from that pushed conclusions to the utmost extreme. Dr. Trudel made a devastating analysis of this work in his introductory pages, omitted here as of lesser interest to Pennsylvanians. He pointed out that Robitaille's book was "the first devoted entirely to the Jumonville question" and "the only one which textbooks and a goodly number of historians have seen fit to cite in bibliography."]

same errors. A new study of the Jumonville question is also a logical consequence of the publication of the *Contrecoeur Papers*.² These papers shed a new light, not so much on the Jumonville affair itself (on this the essentials were given by Leduc³) as on the entirety of the Ohio quarrel which includes it and explains it.

Here are the main lines of this new study: *Who owned the Ohio valley? Did the French know the exact limits of what they called their incontestable territory? What was the object of Jumonville's mission? How did Jumonville conduct himself after his departure from Fort Duquesne up to his encounter with Washington? Just what happened on that morning of May 28, 1754? How did national policy use this affair?* To be complete, this study ought to raise other questions and sub-questions, but the confines of this article hardly permit more, and even for these the answers will have to be brief.

WHO OWNED THE OHIO VALLEY?

In Europe's race to occupy the American soil, the Ohio valley long remained a forgotten corner because of the mirage of the Western Sea. The problem of the Ohio did not come up until well along in the eighteenth century. The Treaty of Utrecht recognized that the Indians of the Five Nations were subject to Great Britain and, with respect to the "inhabitants of these Regions," it stated that "Commissioners would rule exactly and distinctly which of them would be or ought to be adjudged subjects and friends of France or of G. B."⁴ This treaty of 1713 decided and confirmed nothing as to the ownership of the Ohio. In 1726

² Fernand Grenier, ed., *Papiers Contrecoeur et autres documents concernant le conflit anglo-français sur l'Ohio de 1745 à 1746*. Quebec, Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1952. [Published under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.]

³ Gilbert F. Leduc, *Washington and "The Murder of Jumonville."* Boston, La Société Historique Franco-Américaine, 1943. [In a passage which has been deleted, Dr. Trudel gave high praise to this work, but pointed out that it failed to attract notice since it was "published in English only and at Boston." "It looked like a special pleading, and it was, in fact, a direct reply to Robitaille, made by an American." Therefore, Gustave Lanctot, in the *Canadian Historical Review*, XXV (1944), 75 ff., dismissed it "as a lawyer's brief [rather] than a documentary exposition of facts."]

⁴ Article 15 of the Treaty of Utrecht, *Actes, mémoires & autres pièces authentiques concernant la paix d'Utrecht* (Utrecht, Jaques van Poolsum et Guillaume vande Water, 1714), II, 494-496.

the Company of the Indies expressed alarm about this country, "not yet occupied by any nation of Europe." Some Englishmen, they said, have "already made an establishment on the upper part of the Ohio River," and this was disturbing—an establishment must be made immediately on the lower part of the river.⁵ In 1732 the Sieur de Vincennes settled at the confluence of the Wabash and the Ohio, the French now had a post there, but a fort was needed! This fort did not yet exist in 1745, and Governor Vaudreuil of Louisiana advocated it, adding that if the English should install themselves there before the French, they would become the "masters of the navigation of the whole Upper Country."⁶ The English did not remain inactive; in 1744, by the Treaty of Lancaster, they obtained half a million acres west of the Appalachians from the Indians, and formed the Ohio Company of Virginia. Then France made an official move: in 1749 Céloron de Blainville was sent with 250 men to make a tour of the Ohio and bury plates here and there to mark the "renewal of possession . . . of the said river Oyo and of all the rivers which fall into it and of all the land on both sides as far as the sources of the said rivers, such as the preceding kings of France have enjoyed or ought to have enjoyed, and as they therein have maintained themselves by arms and by treaties, especially by those of Riswick, Utrecht, and Aix La Chapelle."⁷ They spoke of "renewal of possession"; the first taking possession they were thinking about should have been made by Cavelier de La Salle, but this is today considered a pure invention.⁸ They referred to the treaties of Ryswick, Utrecht, and Aix-la-Chapelle, but there is no clause in these treaties to confirm France's possession of the Ohio. France could more seriously invoke the use made of the Ohio as a military route, for example in 1739 when it was

⁵ Pierre Margry, ed., *Découvertes et établissements des Français dans l'Ouest et dans le Sud de l'Amérique septentrionale* (Paris, Maisonneuve et Ch. Leclerc, 1888), VI, 658-660.

⁶ Vaudreuil to the Minister of Marine, November 4, 1745, in Margry, VI, 661 ff.

⁷ See the facsimile of one of these plates in *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, VI, 80.

⁸ Jean Delanglez, *Louis Joliet. Vie et voyages (1645-1700)*. (Les Etudes de l'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française, 1950), 144-147. [An English edition, Chicago, Institute of Jesuit History, 1948, does not appear to have this specific denial of La Salle's taking possession, which may indeed have been added in the later French edition.]

used in the expedition against the Chickasaws.⁹ She could always maintain that the Ohio was the normal communication between New France and Louisiana, and that the English colonies were separated from the Ohio by a natural barrier, the Appalachians.

The English had good arguments on their side, too. They could cite the second Charter of Virginia which in 1609 granted them the country from one ocean to the other,¹⁰ a strange enough procedure which France also used, as when all North America from Florida to the Arctic Circle was granted to the Compagnie des Cent-Associés.¹¹ The English could match Cavelier de La Salle by a certain Gabriel Arthur who was taken prisoner in 1674 while exploring, and who reached in spite of himself what seems to have been the Ohio River.¹² They could affirm that they had long had trading posts on the Ohio, which is repeatedly confirmed in French correspondence of the period. They could especially invoke their Treaty of Lancaster with the Indians, if it was true that the Indians were the legitimate proprietors of the soil. . . . At all events, the *Précis des faits*, published by France in 1756, would have no scruples about stating that up to 1749 "the Oyo had been frequented only by the French, without the English ever making any claim to the country which it waters."¹³

Céloron's tour in 1749 could not settle the question. The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, signed the preceding year, had no clause about the Ohio, but the very year of the famous expedition commissioners were entrusted with the task of conferring "on the respective boundaries which are presently in dispute between the two Crowns, both those of Nova Scotia or Acadia and those in other parts of

⁹ Hocquart to the Minister, September 30, 1739, *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec* (1922-1923), 184. [This was the expedition of the Baron de Longueuil; see *Historic Pennsylvania Leaflet* No. 16, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1953.]

¹⁰ Second Charter of Virginia, May 23, 1609, in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Documents of American History* (N. Y., F. S. Crofts & Co., 1943), 10-12.

¹¹ *Edits, Ordonnances royaux* (Quebec, E. R. Fréchette, 1854), I, 7.

¹² Clarence Walworth Alvord and Lee Bidgood, eds., *The First Explorations of the Trans-Alleghany Region by the Virginians, 1650-1674* (Cleveland, Arthur H. Clark Co., 1912), 207-226.

¹³ *Mémoire contenant le Précis des faits, avec leurs pièces justificatives, pour servir de Réponse aux Observations envoyées par les Ministres d'Angleterre, dans les Cours de l'Europe* (Paris, l'Imprimerie Royale, 1756), 15. This *Mémoire*, hereafter cited as *Précis des faits*, is usually attributed to Choiseul.

this continent where the settlements of the two Nations border one another."¹⁴ It was even agreed then "that no innovation should be made in the countries on whose disposition they were to pronounce."¹⁵ However, the task of the commissioners made no real headway; neither the English nor the French had the patience to wait for a decision which was never going to be made, anyway. In the autumn of 1752, Governor Duquesne announced the sending of a detachment "to go and seize and establish itself on the Belle Riviere, which we are on the verge of losing if I do not make this hasty but indispensable effort."¹⁶ Thus the French made a move which La Pause was to characterize as menacing and premature.¹⁷ They established Forts Presque Isle and Le Boeuf which secured the gateway to the Belle Rivière. The English protested, the Governor of Virginia wrote Legardeur de Saint-Pierre in 1753 that "the Lands upon the River Ohio, in the western parts of the Colony of Virginia, are . . . notoriously known to be the property of the Crown of Great Britain."¹⁸ Duquesne instructed Contrecoeur to reply to the English governor that "your instructions state that the Belle Riviere and its dependencies belong incontestably to the Most Christian King."¹⁹ Duquesne also wrote Legardeur de Saint-Pierre that the Governor of Virginia's "claims to the Belle Riviere are a real chimera, for it belongs to us incontestably," and he added this very significant comment, "Moreover, the King wants it, and that is enough for us to march ahead."²⁰ There we have the explanation; everyone wanted it and everyone marched ahead.

To parry the French threat, the English sent Captain Trent, in the spring of 1754, to establish a fort at the Forks of the Ohio. Two score men had scarcely begun the works when Contrecoeur arrived with almost a thousand men, threatened the English with his artillery, and compelled them to surrender and retire.²¹ Contre-

¹⁴ Memoir from the British Court, delivered to French Minister, July 24, 1749, in *Précis des faits*, 72.

¹⁵ *Précis des faits*, 6.

¹⁶ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, October 12, 1752, in Fernand Grenier, ed., *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 17.

¹⁷ *Mémoire et reflexions*, RAPQ (1933-1934), 148.

¹⁸ Dinwiddie to Saint-Pierre, October 30, 1753, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 77.

¹⁹ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, January 30, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 96.

²⁰ Duquesne to Saint-Pierre, January 30, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 98 ff.

²¹ Washington, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 7 n; *Précis des faits*, 20 ff. The *Précis* piles up errors freely. According to it, the English were al-

coeur continued work on the fort and the new military establishment received the name of Duquesne. The two nations were still at peace, and the commissioners were still at work delimiting frontiers. . . . But the French had built Fort Le Boeuf, the English had begun a fort on the Ohio and had been compelled to capitulate and retreat by Contrecoeur's much superior force.

This was a very definite plan of action: to seize the Ohio at any cost, and to deny the English any rights there. The orders were clear, but there was at least one occasion when an officer under Contrecoeur did not completely grasp the full extent of the claims. In July, 1754, when Coulon de Villiers had Washington sign the capitulation of Fort Necessity, he stipulated in article 6 that the English should give "word of honor no longer to work on any establishment in this place nor on this side of the height of land for one year counting from this day."²² That was a grave error indeed, to limit this prohibition to a year only, and Duquesne informed Contrecoeur that this article "is contradictory to the summons you made, as it would appear that the English have the same right of possession on the Belle Riviere as we do. You will not fail to repeat unceasingly to your captains how wrong they are to want to seize our lands where we have had establishments for almost a century, and that I disapprove very strongly the mistake which was made in article six."²³ Unfortunately, this prohibition limited to a year only was inscribed in an official text, which would be quite embarrassing when this text had to be cited. The *Précis des faits* got out of this difficulty in the easiest way imaginable: when it produced the capitulation of Fort Necessity as evidence, the *Précis* omitted the words which did not suit. This official French government report reproduced

ready entrenched under Trent's command; when summoned to retire, "They did so, evacuated their fort peaceably, and even asked the Sieur de Contrecoeur to give them food, which they lacked; he had it given to them abundantly, and destroyed the fort"; then Contrecoeur went to establish himself further down the river. The historical truth is very different: the English had only about forty workmen who *were beginning* the fort, Trent was absent, the English when summoned asked for a delay, but Contrecoeur granted only an hour while threatening the English with his artillery; when he became master of the place, he did not destroy the fort but completed it. This affair is very important to explain what happened in May, 1754.

²² Capitulation of Fort Necessity, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 204.

²³ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, July 25, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 223 ff.

among its supporting evidence a mutilated document.²⁴ In this whole business, all the misdeeds were not on the English side.

DID THE FRENCH KNOW THE EXACT LIMITS OF WHAT THEY
CALLED THEIR INCONTESTABLE TERRITORY?

The French said they were incontestably the proprietors of the Ohio; did they know the exact limits of the territory they claimed? This question must be raised before studying the Jumonville affair in detail. Governor Duquesne, whom the King had ordered to seize the Ohio, hardly knew how far this territory extended. On July 10, 1753, he wrote Marin, "As I have found nothing in the Secretariat which could inform me about the limits of the Belle Riviere, and as there are commissioners from each side working on them, get information from the Sieur de Joncaire as to where he thinks the borders are; and for the time being you should drive off and pillage all the English who are on our land, and if any should be found on the edge, you will have them informed that if they come to trade among us, they will be arrested and their goods will be pillaged. I remember that I have been told there was a chain of mountains in a southern direction from the Belle Riviere which has always been regarded as the limits of our territory. Find out from the Sieur de Joncaire if what I have been told is in agreement with what that officer knows."²⁵ Duquesne knew then that commissioners had been appointed to delimit the frontiers, but while awaiting their conclusions he was willing to rely on Joncaire, and the basis for pillaging the English traders was found in the statements of a mere individual. As to the "chain of mountains," any precise claim would be a mere guess so long as surveyors had not fixed the boundary points officially.

A little later, still without authorization from the commissioners, Governor Duquesne fixed the limit of claims at ten or twelve leagues from the river, and wrote Contrecoeur, "I would not take exception to what they might build at a distance from the Belle Riviere. . . . I would certainly not pick a quarrel with people who

²⁴ *Précis*, 155. The words, "for one year counting from this day," were omitted.

²⁵ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, July 10, 1753, Archives du Séminaire de Québec, V-V, carton V, liasse B: 62.

would be 10 to 12 leagues distant from the riverbank."²⁶ That was in April, 1754. On May 9, in his instructions to Péan, he stipulated up to what point the English could not come and establish themselves: "In case on his way he should find any English settlements no farther than six leagues distant from the riverbank, he should summon them to retire, give the plunder to the Indians, and destroy the said establishments."²⁷ No English fort was to be permitted within eighteen miles of the Ohio, but what of traders! They were not to be endured within 30 to 36 miles of the Ohio, and as it would be better to drive them back still farther, but without being directly involved, the Governor suggested using the allied Indians to plunder "the traders who are more than 10 or 12 leagues from the banks of the Belle Riviere."²⁸ This letter was on May 22. On June 20, not yet knowing of the Jumonville affair, Duquesne extended even farther the limits of the territory claimed: "You will observe," he wrote again to Contrecoeur, "that nothing which is twenty or thirty leagues distant from your fort is to be exposed to violence, but when the opportunity occurs, the English must be told that if they do not clear out, they will be seized, and their houses will be burned. When making this announcement, order that they be done no injury, and you will see that this will have a very good effect, since it combines the proper courtesies of peace time with the advantages which may be derived from it."²⁹

Therefore, what was "twenty to thirty leagues" distant from Fort Duquesne ought not to suffer violence, but by threats the English should be driven farther away. Thus from one month to another the frontiers were pushed back farther and farther: in April, Duquesne did not object to the English being 30 to 36 miles from the Ohio; in May, he wanted the Indians to drive away the traders who were beyond that zone; in June, the minimum limit was 60 to 90 miles. This was an extremely vague limit: within the undefined space between 60 and 90 miles many incidents might occur. At any rate, these were the extreme frontiers

²⁶ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, April 15, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 115.

²⁷ Addition to the instructions given to Sieur Péan on June 26, 1753, made on May 9, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 121.

²⁸ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, May 22, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 128.

²⁹ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, June 20, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 189.

of June, 1754. At the time of the Jumonville affair, they did not reach so far, for when Contrecoeur sent Jumonville out on May 23, he could not have had the letter written by Duquesne in Montreal on May 22, and his latest instructions specified 10 to 12 leagues. Indeed that would have been enough to make the English indignant, for they, too, considered themselves uncontestedly the masters of the Ohio, and that the French had driven them from the Forks by a threat of force. Now Washington was going to encounter Jumonville even farther inland than these 10 to 12 leagues; in fact, the fatal spot was located 42 miles from Fort Duquesne as the crow flies, and Jumonville could reach it only after a journey of some 60 miles.³⁰ Considering only Duquesne's claims, it may be stated bluntly that the Jumonville affair took place beyond the maximum frontier, in a place which Duquesne had not yet claimed in May, 1754. To be sure, Washington did not know about all these purely arbitrary changes in frontiers, but when he met Jumonville, he knew that the Frenchman was separated from Fort Duquesne by a sixty-mile march; yet he could read in the summons, "It has already been reported to me by the Indians that you were coming armed with overt force on the lands of the King my master."³¹ It is not surprising that Washington considered this summons "insolent."³²

WHAT WAS THE OBJECT OF JUMONVILLE'S MISSION?

At this point, it can be asked what was the object of Jumonville's mission. May 23, 1754, Contrecoeur gave Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers, Sieur de Jumonville, a summons which he was to present to the commander of the British troops if he found any "on the lands of the King's domain." In the text of the summons, Contrecoeur declared that he was astonished to learn that this English commander was advancing "armed and with overt force upon the lands of the King my master, without even being able to believe it; yet as I must neglect nothing in getting correct information, I am detaching M. de Jumonville to see for himself and, in case he finds you there, to summon you in the

³⁰ Jumonville ascended the Monongahela as far as the mouth of Red Stone Creek, and then went across country.

³¹ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 130.

³² Washington, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 34.

name of the King.”³³ Jumonville must therefore find out if the English were “on the lands of the King,” and in that case present a summons to them. Such a mission was legitimate but difficult indeed, since it was not known how far those “lands of the King” extended. Here, however, studying the text of the summons is not enough; the instructions which Contrecoeur gave Jumonville must be examined. By virtue of these instructions, Jumonville was first to verify the presence of the English “on the lands of the King’s domain.” In case he found them there, “we order him,” wrote Contrecoeur, “before making the summons, to send us a good pair of legs in order to inform us about what he has learned on the day he expects to make the summons.”³⁴ To the mission’s original object of summoning the English was added another; before the summons was presented, Jumonville was to send “a good pair of legs” to transmit what he had seen. If Jumonville was an envoy, what justification for such proceedings? Why did Contrecoeur want to know what Jumonville had seen, before the summons was presented? Why did he want to be forewarned as to the day of the summons? If, as seems likely, he wanted to dispatch forces against the English as soon as possible after the summons, he was misusing Jumonville’s status as an envoy. If he wanted merely to be kept informed of events, it is not clear why he ordered Jumonville to send “a good pair of legs” before making the summons.

All this is astonishing, but it should be remembered that Washington had acted similarly on his mission as an envoy the previous fall. On the way to Fort Le Boeuf to summon the French to withdraw, he stopped to hold council with the Indians, and at Fort Le Boeuf he made painstaking notes of its arrangements and its system of defence.³⁵ The methods of each side were similar; envoys did not have a single well-defined mission, but of their own accord or by order they carried out functions which

³³ Summons to be made by M. de Jumonville, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 130. At the end of the text, it reads, “Done at the camp at Fort Duquesne, May 23, 1754,” and on the back, in Contrecoeur’s hand, “Second summons to the English if M. de Jumonville finds them on his scouting expedition of May 23, 1754.” (*Ibid.*, 131).

³⁴ *Précis des faits*, 104. The original of the instructions has been lost, but at least the copy in the *Précis* may be helpful.

³⁵ Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Diaries of George Washington* (N. Y., Houghton Mifflin, 1925), I, 47-51, 59.

were totally improper for envoys. Let it be said, however, in defence of Jumonville, that not until after the affair did Washington discover that the French envoy actually had a double mission. Therefore, Washington's precipitate conduct cannot be explained in terms of Contrecoeur's instructions, but rather by the way Jumonville carried out his mission.

HOW DID JUMONVILLE CONDUCT HIMSELF AFTER HIS DEPARTURE FROM FORT DUQUESNE UP TO HIS ENCOUNTER WITH WASHINGTON?

The envoy Jumonville set out on his way. The *Précis des faits*, in an attempt to show that the French had acted without concealment, wrote: "This deputy left with an escort of thirty men and the next morning he found himself surrounded by a troop of English and Indians."³⁶ But Jumonville actually left Fort Duquesne on May 23³⁷ and did not encounter the English until May 28. What did he do between the 23rd and the 28th? His orders were precise: "He is to follow the river Mal-enguée in pirogues as far as the shed, after which he is to march until he finds the road connecting with the one the English have had constructed."³⁸ The shed was located at the mouth of Red Stone Creek, or some forty miles from Fort Duquesne, allowing for the bends of the Monongahela. From the shed to the place where Jumonville was encamped on the 28th, it is some twenty miles. Normally, only two days would be needed to make this journey; what could have delayed Jumonville? One thing is certain, that Jumonville arrived at the scene of battle on or about the evening of the 26th, for Drouillon, the officer accompanying him, stated: "We had continued a day in the Place where we were attack'd."³⁹ What was the reason for this long halt? Drouillon explained that the party was no more than seven miles from the English camp, but "We were so far from knowing this, y't we had only the

³⁶ *Précis des faits*, 21.

³⁷ The summons and the instructions were signed on May 23; Jumonville was ordered to leave immediately, and Contrecoeur spoke of the "scouting party of May 23," *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 131; *Précis des faits*, 104 ff.

³⁸ *Précis des faits*, 104.

³⁹ Drouillon to Dinwiddie, undated letter, in *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, R. A. Brock, ed. (*Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, New Series, Vol. III, 1883), I, 226.

most uncertain Acc'ts that the Eng. were at all in those Parts."⁴⁰ But Jumonville was 36 years old and therefore had some experience in warfare; he had Contrecoeur's recommendation "to keep on his guard against any surprise, either from the English or the Indians."⁴¹ What explanation can be given for his camping a whole day in the same place without sending scouts out ahead (after all, he had more than thirty men under his command)? If he did send out scouts, why did these scouts not suspect that the English were near at hand, whereas Washington, since the beginning of May, was kept informed of the goings and comings of the French in the Monongahela valley? Either Jumonville displayed inexplicable imprudence, or else he was devoting part of his time to carrying out a mission which was essentially improper for an envoy.

On his side, Washington had every reason to be suspicious. He remembered very well the journey he had made to Fort Le Boeuf, five months earlier; accompanied by a guide, an interpreter, four traders, and some Indians, he had been well treated, but incidents had occurred. In the course of a dinner, French officers had their tongues loosened by wine, and declared it was their fixed intention to take possession of the Ohio, whatever the cost.⁴² When the mission was completed, the French did their utmost to prevent the Indians from returning with the envoy.⁴³ Finally, on the return trip, Washington and Gist encountered a party of pro-French Indians on December 27, and these Indians fired at them.⁴⁴ Washington and Gist escaped harm, but in May, 1754, all these memories were fresh in Washington's mind. He had learned to be on the watch for intrigues and surprises.

Washington was impelled to mistrust by still more serious reasons. As he was advancing toward the Monongahela, the Indians brought him alarming news of French military activities.⁴⁵ On

⁴⁰ *Loc. cit.*

⁴¹ *Précis des faits*, 104.

⁴² Washington, *Diaries*, I, 55

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I, 57, 61 ff.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 64.

⁴⁵ On the historicity of Washington's Journal, see the comments of Fernand Grenier in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 133, note 1, and of Donald H. Kent in "Contrecoeur's Copy of George Washington's Journal for 1754," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX (1952), 1-9. The original which the *Précis des faits* claimed to possess has never been found, so that it is not known how faithful the translation is. At all events, it is noticeable that the *Précis des faits*

April 20, he learned that, three days earlier, the French had seized the fort which the British had begun at the Forks of the Ohio.⁴⁶ On May 10, he learned that a party of Frenchmen commanded by Laforce had come to Christopher Gist's post "under the specious pretense of hunting deserters";⁴⁷ he thereupon detached Captain Stephen with twenty-five men to watch Laforce and examine the country.⁴⁸ On the 16th two traders reported that French parties were often seen in the direction of Gist's.⁴⁹ But the news became still more alarming. Actually, on May 24, the day after Jumonville set out from Fort Duquesne, Washington received a letter from Thaninhisson (also called the Half King), alluding to a French army which was going out to meet Washington. Thaninhisson declared that the French "are resolved to strike the first English they see," and that they had been on the march for two days.⁵⁰ The afternoon of the same day, a trader stated that he had seen two Frenchmen the night before, and that there was "a strong detachment on the march"; then Washington decided to entrench himself.⁵¹ On May 27, Gist reported that a party of fifty men commanded by Laforce had come to his place the evening before, and would have broken up everything if the two Indians he had left there as caretakers had not prevented it. Gist added that he had seen their tracks five miles from Washington's camp, and Washington detached 75 men to pursue them.⁵² That was the state of things on the evening of

omits some passages which are found in the copy in the *Papiers Contrecoeur*, and that it reproduces some paragraphs not found there. Moreover, a fair number of facts given in these French versions are confirmed by Washington's letters to Dinwiddie.

⁴⁶ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 136; *Précis des faits*, 111; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 11; Washington to Dinwiddie, April 25, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 6.

⁴⁷ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 146; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 15-16. This part of the Journal is not in the *Précis des faits*.

⁴⁸ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 146 ff.; *Précis des faits*, 118; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 16.

⁴⁹ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 148; *Précis des faits*, 119; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 16.

⁵⁰ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 152 ff.; *Précis des faits*, 123; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 23; Washington to Dinwiddie, May 27, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 24 ff.

⁵¹ *Précis des faits*, 124; Washington to Dinwiddie, May 27, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 25; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 19, note 94.

⁵² *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 155; *Précis des faits*, 125; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 24; Washington to Dinwiddie, May 27, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 25.

the 27th when Thaninbisson informed Washington that "they had seen along the road the tracks of two men which went down into a gloomy hollow, and that he imagined that the whole party was hidden there." Fearing "that this was a stratagem of the French to attack our camp," Washington took forty men with him and marched all night "through a heavy rain, with the night as black as pitch," and "on the 28th, about sunrise," he wrote, "we arrived at the camp of the Indians, where, after holding council with the Half King, we decided to strike jointly." Before attack-



THE HALF KING'S ROCK

Photograph by P.A.W.W., May 28, 1954, at 6:30 a.m., Standard Time—exactly two hundred years after Washington's conference with the Half King.

ing, Washington sent out two scouts "to see where they were and how they were arranged, and also to reconnoiter the vicinity."⁵³ The scouts discovered the French "half a mile from the road, in a very obscure place surrounded with rocks."⁵⁴

⁵³ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 155 ff.; *Précis des faits*, 125 ff.; "Contrecoeur's Copy . . .," *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 20-21. The details are almost the same in Washington to Dinwiddie, May 29, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 32.

⁵⁴ Washington to Dinwiddie, May 29, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 32. Monceau, who was a member of Jumonville's party, was to say "that

In order to understand Washington's conduct, one must keep in mind all these incidents occurring since the middle of April, the time when the French seized the fort begun by Trent, and especially since the middle of May, with parties of Frenchmen going and coming in the Monongahela valley. The party of which he was told on the 24th, as intending to strike the first Englishmen it encountered, was undoubtedly Jumonville's party. Washington was evidently misinformed as to this party's mission, but there is no question but that the mysterious behavior of this party gave Washington very good reason to fear it. Laforce who came to Gists's on May 26 and threatened to break up everything there, was one of Jumonville's group!⁵⁵ Washington had a search made everywhere for this detachment on the march. At first, only tracks were found; then, after a thorough search, the detachment was found hidden half a mile from the road in a very obscure place. If Washington can be reproached for having trusted the reports of his scouts and the Indians too blindly as to the aggressive character of Jumonville's detachment, it must be recognized at the same time that Jumonville could have done nothing better calculated to confirm Washington's suspicions. Therefore, Washington was convinced that this party of Frenchmen wanted to surprise him, and decided to forestall the blow by taking the offensive.

JUST WHAT HAPPENED ON THAT MORNING OF MAY 28, 1754?

Now we are up to the morning of May 28, at seven or eight o'clock. About this French and English witnesses agree,⁵⁶ and since it is the end of May, the sun has been up at least three hours. Talk about "attacking the worthy Jumonville in pitch dark . . . shooting pointblank men in their beds, in the night without warn-

they were camped in a heavy rain in a hollow, where they slept." *Précis des faits*, 107.

⁵⁵ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 157.

⁵⁶ According to Monceau, "at seven o'clock" (*Précis des faits*, 107); Drouillon wrote: "at about 7 Or 8 o'Clock in the Morning." (Drouillon to Dinwiddie, *Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, I, 225); Stephen said, "to Breakfast" (*Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 19, 1754); Washington reached the camp of the Indians "about sunrise," held council with the Half King, sent out scouts, and finally attacked, which certainly brings the action about seven or eight o'clock (*Papiers Contrecoeur*, 156).



JUMONVILLE GLEN

Photograph by P.A.W.W., May 28, 1954, shortly after 7:00 a.m., Standard Time—exactly two hundred years after Washington's skirmish.

ing,"⁵⁷ is sheer imagination; there is no doubt that it was broad daylight. What happened?

To find out, we shall not consult historians, but direct evidence. This evidence is not abundant. The first witness, in chronological order, is Monceau, the Canadian who succeeded in escaping before the death of his commander. It was on the basis of his evidence that Contrecoeur wrote Duquesne, "In the morning, at seven o'clock, they found they were surrounded by English on one side and Indians on the other. They received two volleys from the English, and not from the Indians. Through an interpreter M. de Jumonville told them to stop, as he had to speak to them. They stopped. M. de Jumonville had the summons read to them, my summons for them to retire, of which I have the honor

⁵⁷ Robitaille, *Washington et Jumonville*, 25, 32. A number of historians have repeated this error.

to send you a copy. While it was being read, the said Monceau saw all our Frenchmen coming up behind M. de Jumonville, so that they formed a platoon in the midst of the English and Indians. Meanwhile, Monceau slipped to one side, and went off through the woods."⁵⁸ According to Monceau, therefore, Jumonville had someone read the summons and, during the reading, the French had come around their leader. Monceau saw nothing further.

Now, while Contrecoeur was writing his letter, he received a message from La Chauvignerie, commander at Chiningué,⁵⁹ who informed him "that we have certainly lost eight men, of whom M. de Jumonville is one." He continued: "The Indians who were present at the attack say that M. de Jumonville was killed while he was hearing the summons read; that he received a rifle shot in the head, after which they struck to wipe out our whole force. The Indians who were present rushed forward and stopped the English, otherwise all our men would have been routed."⁶⁰ Of what value is this second bit of evidence, supplied by the Indians? First, who were these Indians "who were present at the attack" and who tried to prevent the English from killing all the rest of Jumonville's party? Contrecoeur's orders of May 23 do not mention any Indian as forming part of the group; Contrecoeur merely enjoined Jumonville to make friends with any he met.⁶¹ The only Indians whose activity is on record are those who kept Washington informed of the comings and goings of Jumonville, and helped him to discover the hiding place of the French. As for the Indians of whom La Chauvignerie spoke, they were the only persons to relate that they threw themselves between the French and the English. No other witness, French or English, speaks of this surprising intervention. When these Indians bragged of saving the lives of the Frenchmen, they were merely trying to get in the good graces of the French; and there is even more reason to doubt their sincerity, since, about this time, an Indian chief who had aided Washington in the affair left Chiningué with French scalps to visit the Lake Erie tribes

⁵⁸ Contrecoeur to Duquesne, June 2, 1754, *Précis des faits*, 107.

⁵⁹ Logstown, near present-day Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

⁶⁰ Contrecoeur to Duquesne, June 2, 1754, *Précis des faits*, 107 ff. The original of this letter has been lost.

⁶¹ *Précis des faits*, 104 ff.

and arouse them to war against the French, and since, before leaving this chief ordered the Indians of Chiningué to go and join the English force at Red Stone Creek.⁶² The evidence of these Indians is anonymous and too untrustworthy to be considered.

Another witness is the officer Drouillon, who was taken prisoner during the skirmish. He wrote Governor Dinwiddie a letter to prove that he was an envoy, a letter in which he evidently worked up all the arguments that might support his cause. What did he say of the incident on May 28? "Mr. Washington might have taken Notice w'n he attacked Us at about 7 or 8 o'Clock in the Morning, y't neither we nor our own Men took to our arms: he might have heard our Interpreter, who desir'd him to come to our Cabbin, y't we might confer together, instead of taking that Opp'ty to fire upon Us."⁶³ Drouillon was trying to prove that he accompanied an envoy, and yet he said not a word about the reading of the summons, nor about an attempt to read it; the interpreter had merely called to Washington for negotiations. Who was right, Drouillon or Monceau? And if Washington denied that they had called out for him not to fire,⁶⁴ who was right? Moreover, Drouillon stated that the French did not use their fire-arms, and Washington said that the French "ran to their arms, and fired briskly."⁶⁵ Who told the truth, Drouillon or Washington? It seems very likely that Washington did, for the English had one man killed and two or three wounded, as Washington wrote the day after the affair.⁶⁶

On the French side, there is still more evidence, but so vague as to be of little value. Two of Jumonville's men, Jean-Baptiste Berger and Joachim Parent, taken prisoners in the affair, signed a deposition in 1755 confirming *all* the circumstances of the *assassination* of Jumonville, but giving no information about what these circumstances might be.⁶⁷ Secondly, in a letter from J. B. Boucher, priest at Laprairie, to John Neilson, there is mention of

⁶² Washington to Dinwiddie, June 10, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 44.

⁶³ Drouillon to Dinwiddie, *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, I, 225.

⁶⁴ Washington to Dinwiddie, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 39.

⁶⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁶⁶ Washington to Colonel Joshua Fry, May 29, 1754, *ibid.*, 26; Washington to Dinwiddie, same day, *ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁷ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 204, note 4.

two witnesses, "one eye-witness and one by hearsay," who contradicted the traditional version of the French. Boucher wrote, "The party of scouts whom M. Jumonville led were encountered in a small valley by a detachment of English and Indians, commanded by Washington, it is said. The English fired a volley which felled M. Jumonville, who certainly did not then utter the words which M. Thomas attributed to him. I have this account from a man some paces from where M. Jumonville fell. The same thing had already been reported to me before by another man to whom it had been related, with the same details, by a person who had been in the same party, but who died several years ago. These two witnesses, one eye-witness and one by hearsay, are both respectable and informed persons. M. Jumonville had, it is true, a commission to enter into negotiations with the English, but he was also provided with a commission to attack them, if he was the strongest."⁶⁸ These unknown witnesses do not give evidence themselves, and their evidence can be used at most only to prove that the French did not agree on this story. Finally, there is the evidence from the Frenchmen who deserted Contrecoeur's camp for Washington's; nine of them arrived on June 10 to join the English.⁶⁹ "These deserters," Washington wrote, "corroborate what the others said and we suspected. La Force's party were sent as spies, and were to show that summons if discovered, or overpowered, by a superior party of ours. They say the commander was blamed for sending so small a party."⁷⁰ The French deserters declared, therefore, that Jumonville was a spy and that his status as envoy was only a blind; but since these deserters are anonymous witnesses with a motive to please the English, we can only make note of their evidence without drawing conclusions from it.

On the English side, how was the event reported? In a letter to Dinwiddie, Washington said merely, "I thereupon, in conjunction with the Half-King and Monacawacha, formed a disposition to attack them on all sides, which we accordingly did, and, after an engagement of about fifteen minutes, we killed ten,

⁶⁸ Rev. J. B. Boucher to John Neilson, May 10, 1806, in Public Archives of Canada, Collection Neilson, *Lettres publiques*; see the summary in *Report of the Public Archives of Canada*, 1913, 105 ff.

⁶⁹ Washington to Dinwiddie, June 10, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 45.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

wounded one, and took twenty-one prisoners. Among those killed was M. de Jumonville, the commander.”⁷¹ And he applied himself to show, with Jumonville’s papers, that the French were scouts and not envoys: when “with many smooth stories” they pretended they came on an embassy, “they were confuted in them all, and, by circumstances too plain to be denied, almost made ashamed of their assertions.” Then, returning to a detail of the affair, he added, “I have heard, since they went away, that they should say they called to us not to fire; but that I know to be false, for I was the first man that approached them, and the first whom they saw, and immediately upon it they ran to their arms, and fired briskly till they were defeated.”⁷² The same details are found in Washington’s Journal: “We had advanced quite near them according to plan, when they discovered us. Then I gave my men orders to fire; my fire was supported by Mr. Wager’s, and my men and his received the entire fire of the French during most of the action, which lasted only a quarter of an hour until the enemy were routed. . . . They pretended that they called out to us as soon as we were discovered. This is an absolute falsehood, for I was then at the head of the file going toward them, and I can affirm that, as soon as they saw us, they ran for their arms without calling, which I should have heard if they had done so.”⁷³ In Washington’s evidence, as in Drouillon’s, there is no mention of reading a summons: the argument relates to other details: did the French resort to their arms? Did the French call the English to a conference? The answer to the first is that the French did use their arms, for the English had one man killed and some wounded; but whether the French fired or not, this point is less important than the second, the invitation to a conference, which Drouillon affirms and Washington denies. How can a historian today choose between these two?

There is still other evidence. Adam Stephen, one of Washington’s officers, provides information, part of which agrees with what is known already through Washington. On September 19, 1754, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* published the following statement by Stephen: “At Day-light we put our Arms in the best Order

⁷¹ Washington to Dinwiddie, May 29, 1754, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 32.

⁷² Washington to Dinwiddie, undated, *Writings* (Sparks ed.), II, 39.

⁷³ *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 156-157, 160; *Précis des faits*, 126, 129; “Contrecoeur’s Copy . . .,” *Pennsylvania History*, XIX, 21, 22.

we could (for it rained without Intermission) and came up with the *French* to Breakfast. A smart Action ensu'd; their Arms and Ammunition were dry, being shelter'd by the Bark Huts they slept in; we could not depend on ours, and therefore keeping up our Fire, advanced as near as we could with fixt Bayonets, and received their Fire. They had chosen a Place to encamp in with great Judgment, either to hide or defend themselves, but our Bayonets gave us an Advantage over them: *Jomonville*, and eleven private Men were killed on the Spot."⁷⁴ This account by Stephen gives interesting details that cannot be found elsewhere, and it confirms Washington's testimony on these essential points, that the French immediately resorted to their arms, and that no interpreter called out to the English for a conference. Coming from an officer, this testimony is important, but as it actually duplicates the essential points of Washington's version, other evidence must be sought for further enlightenment.

There were also the English deserters who took refuge in the French camp. Like the French deserters in Washington's camp, they had a motive in speaking so as to please the enemy. On June 30, an English deserter, "Denis Kaninguen," arrived at Fort Duquesne; he stated that "M. de Jumonville was killed by an English detachment which surprised him. This officer had advanced to communicate his orders to the English commander, in spite of the musket-fire the commander had aimed at him. On hearing the reading of it, he withdrew to his men whom he ordered to fire on the French. M. de Jumonville was wounded, and had fallen. Thaninhison, an Indian, came to him and said, 'You are not dead yet, my father,' and struck him several blows with his hatchet, which killed him."⁷⁵ It is not certain that this Englishman was present at the affair, but he speaks as if he was. At any rate, it is certain that this English deserter recited the French version faithfully, just as the French deserters repeated the English version to Washington. The testimony of the two sets of deserters tends to cancel itself out.

What is left of all this evidence? We eliminate the Indians, because they are anonymous and were obviously playing a double

⁷⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 19, 1754 (microfilm in Pennsylvania State Library).

⁷⁵ *Journal de de Léry, RAPQ* (1927-1928), 372 ff.; *Journal of Chaussegros de Léry, 1754-1755* (Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1940), 27-28.

game. We eliminate Jean-Baptiste Berger, Joachim Parent, and Boucher's anonymous witnesses, because we have no details of their testimony. We eliminate the French and English deserters because they evidently had strong motives to ingratiate themselves with the enemy. We can even disregard Adam Stephen's evidence because, in the essential points, it resembles Washington's too closely and therefore does not shed any special light on the problem. Three witnesses remain, Monceau, Drouillon, and Washington—that is, two members of Jumonville's expedition and the commander of the English detachment.

If Monceau and Drouillon, completely separated from each other, gave exactly the same version, their evidence would swing the scales of truth toward their side. But the evidence of Monceau and Drouillon does not agree. Monceau says that Jumonville had ceased fire and that the reading of the summons was begun. Drouillon, seeking to impress Governor Dinwiddie with his diplomatic status, says only that the interpreter, at the moment of the attack, called out to Washington for a conference. The evidence of the officer Drouillon is certainly more substantial, for perhaps Monceau did not see very well because of his hurried departure. Perhaps, too, he was that "good pair of legs" which Jumonville was to dispatch to Fort Duquesne, according to Contrecoeur's instructions; he may have learned his lesson too well in advance. However, Drouillon's version, which seems to be the most trustworthy French version, is entirely contradicted by Washington. Taking into account how quickly this skirmish of May 28 happened in no more than fifteen minutes, and also what a state of nerves it must have produced on both sides, Washington's version appears just as trustworthy as Drouillon's. It is regrettable that no official inquiry on the Jumonville affair was ever made, for such an inquiry might have been very helpful to history. Lacking the essential facts to settle the question, we can only echo the truly wise pronouncement of Garneau in 1845: "It is probable that there may be truth in both versions of the story; for the collision being precipitate, great confusion ensued."⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Garneau, *Histoire du Canada* (Quebec, Aubin, 1845); English version translated by Andrew Bell (Montreal, John Lovell, 1862), 468. From this it may be seen what a setback Robitaille's book gave history.

HOW DID NATIONAL POLICY USE THIS AFFAIR?

The French of 1754 did not take the time to have a formal inquiry, but immediately brought charges of assassination. On the basis of Monceau's incomplete evidence, supplemented by the Indian accounts, Contrecoeur wrote at once to Duquesne, "I think, Sir, that you will be surprised at the shameful way the English are acting; this is something which has never been known, even among the most uncivilized nations, striking at ambassadors by assassination."⁷⁷ And Duquesne in reply, without further examination: "I did not expect such a sudden change, Sir, as the one you report in your letter of the second of this month, nor that the English could have pushed their cruelty so far as to assassinate an officer bearing orders from me. Yes, this murder is unique and can be avenged only by shedding blood. If the English do not hasten to send me the murderers as a proof of their disavowal, a step which they ought to take at the very scene where the assassination was committed, then lay a heavy hand on everything that can be found belonging to that nation, while waiting for them to give you satisfaction. I have postponed having the war-cry sounded everywhere, because the blow is so foul that I do them the honor of thinking that they will charge it up to the traders of the Belle Riviere. But if it is true that they are marching in force, as you have been told, then the break is deliberate, and you will neglect nothing in repelling force with force."⁷⁸ Therefore, Duquesne took a stand at once and in a very positive manner; he immediately accepted the assassination story, when at that time the death of Jumonville had been described only by Indians, and he called for revenge. But Contrecoeur did not wait for the Governor's reply, he took it upon himself to organize a punitive expedition against the English, which was to leave on June 27. The day before, Jumonville's brother, Louis Coulon de Villiers, arrived at Fort Duquesne; he was given command of the detachment. He marched sixty-five miles from Fort Duquesne to the place where the English had hastily built Fort Necessity. He besieged that fort and made the English sign a capitulation.⁷⁹ On July 25, Governor Duquesne expressed joy at

⁷⁷ Contrecoeur to Duquesne, June 2, 1754, *Précis des faits*, 106-109.

⁷⁸ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, June 24, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 192.

⁷⁹ See the Journal of Villiers, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 196-202.

the news of the fort's capture: "Nothing could be better, Sir, than the pretty action which has just taken place in the upper reaches of the Riviere Mal Engueulée, since it combines courage, caution, and humaneness. In my opinion, it is the finest action which has occurred in Canada. . . . Everything happened as I had hoped; the lesson is a good one, and I expect that it will be engraved in the memory of the English and the Indians."⁸⁰

But although Duquesne was rejoicing at this success, he still had received no reply from the Court about the Jumonville affair. This reply, dated August 19, did not reach him until October 22,⁸¹ and it was not at all what he expected. The Minister of the Marine informed him that the King did not think this affair would have the consequences which Duquesne envisaged, and that he must remain on the defensive while waiting for an explanation from the Court of England.⁸² Duquesne explained this to Contrecoeur, and told him "to conform with the King's wishes, but watch very closely against surprise attacks and against any establishment which might threaten you." The Governor also recommended that he should "tell the Indians that I do not want them to take any scalps, unless you are compelled to have the war-cry sounded, and this should be done only at the last extremity, in view of the most recent orders I have received."⁸³ When this letter of Duquesne's is compared with what he wrote Contrecoeur on June 24 and July 25, it is obvious that Governor Duquesne had really counted too much on the approbation of the Court.

But the damage was already done. The English had legitimate reasons for thinking that they had forestalled a surprise on May 28, and had been attacked at Fort Necessity because of this very affair. Now they were, in turn, eager to take revenge, and at the same time to drive out those whom they considered usurpers. In the autumn of 1754, England gave General Braddock the task of "asserting our just rights and maintaining our possessions in these lands,"⁸⁴ and secret instructions made Braddock's first ob-

⁸⁰ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, July 25, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 221 ff.

⁸¹ Duquesne to Machault, October 28, 1754 *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, 1858), X, 264.

⁸² Letter of August 19, 1754, summarized in *Report of the Archives of Canada*, 1905, I, part 6, 193.

⁸³ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, October 30, 1754, *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 266.

⁸⁴ Instructions, as given in the *Précis des faits*, 160-168.

jective driving the French from the Ohio and establishing himself securely there.⁸⁵ The commissioners had not yet determined the frontiers, but from 1753 on the French and the English were both dragged along in a net of circumstances; Contrecoeur had invaded the Ohio in the spring of 1754, and Braddock followed suit in the spring of 1755. On July 9, he encountered Liénard de Beaujeu on the banks of the Monongahela; Braddock's army was routed, and he himself perished. At the beginning of September, as the English were moving toward Lake George, Dieskau marched against them, was defeated, wounded, and taken prisoner. England and France were still at peace . . .

When England and France declared war in the spring of 1756, this indeed was a mere formality. Now the two powers began to hurl the blame for the situation at each other; England and France circulated memoirs and documentary publications among the courts of Europe. Thus in 1756 there appeared the *Précis des faits*, a collection of documents, some of them taken from Washington and Braddock. The Jumonville affair came into the limelight again, and was used to the utmost to overwhelm England. To attain its purpose, the *Précis des faits*, an official government bulletin of France, did not always take care to verify the facts which it related; it cited from documents only the parts which were to the advantage of the French; and it even went so far as to mutilate texts. As we have seen, it dated the Jumonville affair the day after his departure, although it is known that he left on the 23rd and that the affair took place on the 28th. In support of its account of the affair, it cited the evidence of the only Frenchman who escaped, without giving any indication that he left at the beginning of the skirmish.⁸⁶ It said, too, that the French at Fort Necessity "did not want to take any prisoners because they did not regard themselves as being at war,"⁸⁷ the first explanation given by Villiers in his Journal, but the *Précis* was very careful to omit a second explanation given by Villiers that the prisoners even "in wartime would have been a burden

⁸⁵ See *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, VI, 211-213; and *Précis des faits*, 168-174.

⁸⁶ *Précis des faits*, 21 ff.

⁸⁷ *Précis des faits*, 24.

to us, since they would have used up our provisions.”⁸⁸ The *Précis* also dropped the passage which explained why Villiers decided to propose capitulation to the English;⁸⁹ it dropped Villier’s statement that the English at their fort had been awaiting him for several days,⁹⁰ for any appearance that the French were aggressors must be avoided. Finally, in reproducing the treaty of capitulation signed by the English at Fort Necessity, the *Précis* mutilated the text even more gravely. The original stated clearly that the English promised no longer to make any establishment “at this place nor on this side of the height of land for a year counting from this day,”⁹¹ which recognized that the English had a right to do it at other times. Consequently, the *Précis des faits* suppressed “for a year counting from this day.”⁹² It is astonishing that this same *Précis des faits* should later dare accuse Washington of insincerity.⁹³ Historically, the *Précis des faits* did a great disservice to the cause of France.

Beginning with 1756, then, the exploitation of the Jumonville affair became a matter of national policy. For example, in a pastoral letter in 1755 recounting the attacks of the English, Bishop de Pontbriand did not even mention the Jumonville affair by name; he said only: “Already our neighbors have taken an important post from us. In the upper country they are preparing to attack our advanced forts all at once, in violation of a treaty confirmed by hostages. They are keeping prisoners taken by a surprise attack, and contrary to the laws of war.”⁹⁴ The bishop spoke only about prisoners, he said not a word about what happened to Jumonville only a year before. But in 1756 he returned to this subject, and this time he wrote: “You will remember that

⁸⁸ Compare the text reproduced in the *Précis des faits*, 151, with the text in the *Papiers Contrécocur*, 201. Generally speaking, the *Précis* drops words, parts of phrases, and even paragraphs, whenever they might reflect on France. Fernand Grenier the editor of the *Papiers Contrécocur*, made careful note of all these omissions; see pages 196-202.

⁸⁹ As Villiers wrote, the Indians wanted to leave him the next morning, there was a rumor that the English were to be reinforced, and Villiers would be running out of ammunition in a short time. *Papiers Contrécocur*, 200.

⁹⁰ *Papiers Contrécocur*, 201.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁹² *Précis des faits*, 155.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 123, 125, 126, 130, 139.

⁹⁴ *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des évêques de Québec* (Quebec, 1888), II, 103 ff. (*Mandement* of July 12, 1755).

when we captured Fort Necessity so gloriously, hostages were given to us, as well as a promise to return the prisoners taken in the action when Monsieur de Jumonville was killed contrary to international law and by a kind of assassination.”⁹⁵ This tardy

Capitulation accordée par le Commandant des troupes de Sa Majesté les Catholiques à ceux des troupes angloises actuellement dans le fort de Necessité qui avoit été construite sur des terres du domaine du Roy le 3. Juillet 1756 à huit heures du Soir.

Savoir.

Comme notre intention n'a jamais été de troubler la pais et la bonne harmonie qui devoit régner entre les deux peuples amis, mais seulement de venger l'assassin qui a été fait sur un de nos officiers par le commandant des troupes angloises, comme aussi d'empêcher l'établissement sur les terres du domaine du Roy d'un établissement.

CAPITULATION AT FORT NECESSITY
The arrow points to the key word, "assassin."

recollection was not a matter of chance: war had been declared, and now France was trying to spread its official version of the Jumonville affair.

To make the affair still more widely known, to popularize or immortalize it, poets took up the subject. The first to sing of the *assassination* of Jumonville was a pamphleteer, François-Antoine Chevrier, who published in 1758 a mock-heroic poem in four cantos, entitled, "L'Acadiade; ou, prouesses angloises en Acadie, Canada & c."⁹⁶ This is a violent satire about the actions of the English, and at the same time historical stupidity of the first

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 106. (Mandement of February 15, 1756.)

⁹⁶ *Poème sur des sujets pris de l'histoire de notre tems. Publiés par Mr. D. Partie anglo-gallicane. A Liege, Aux dépens de la Compagnie, M DCC LVIII.* A second title page reads as follows: *L'Acadiade: ou prouesses angloises en Acadie, Canada & c. Poème comi-héroïque, en quatre chants, par Mr. D. A. Cassel, Aux dépens de l'Auteur, M DCC LVIII.*

water. The author wrote "Crevecœur" instead of "Contrecoeur";⁹⁷ he had the English building Fort Necessity before the affair of May 28, and it was there Jumonville brought the summons—at the moment when he approached the fort, he was fired upon.⁹⁸ The poet mixed up Braddock's campaign on the Monongahela with Johnson's campaign on Lake George, and, in the course of the battle, Braddock died at the feet of the *victor* Dieskau.⁹⁹

Another poet smote his warrior lyre on the same subject; in 1759 Antoine-Léonard Thomas published a poem entitled *Jumonville*.¹⁰⁰ This poem opens with an announcement that its subject is "the assassination of Monsieur de Jumonville, and the vengeance for this murder."¹⁰¹ First, the author gives an historical account of the question: the English begin a fort on the Monongahela, Contrecoeur sends an officer to summon them to retire, the English pretend to go away and then finish the fort which they called Necessity. Again, Contrecoeur dispatches an emissary, Jumonville, who leaves on May 29. Jumonville is still some distance from the fort when he is surrounded by Englishmen, who fire upon him. He asks them to listen to him, and the firing stops; he reads his summons, and the English assassinate him, with a single Canadian escaping to bring the news.¹⁰² In all this only one fact, Jumonville's death, is true; but the author does not stop here. He tells us in effect that, since this is an epic poem, it is unnecessary to follow history scrupulously, and so he warns that he is going to make "slight changes" in this history which is already beyond recognition. There will be no capitulation of Fort Necessity, the French will take it by assault and, animated by thoughts of revenge, will carry out a great massacre, while the survivors will be loaded with chains—all this so that the vengeance may appear more overwhelming.¹⁰³ The curious may read this poem, which is a masterpiece of the ridiculous, but let us

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14, 16, 17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-60 (especially, 59).

¹⁰⁰ Only a later edition has been available for consultation: *Oeuvres diverses de M. Thomas, Ci-devant Professeur en l'Université de Paris au Collège de Beauvais, Nouvelle édition . . . Amsterdam, Chez E. Van Harrevelt, M. DCC. LXVII.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 12 ff.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14 ff., 44-47.

pass on to ask if personal indignation led Thomas to deal with this affair. This can be doubted very strongly; his poem seems to have had political motivation, and it is known that he became the secretary of the minister Choiseul after his poem was published.¹⁰⁴

Aubert de Gaspé wrote that if Washington's version were accepted, "the cry of indignation which burst forth in all of New France and even in Europe" could not be explained, "for the French have never been reproached for lamenting like women over the loss of their best generals, or even over a disastrous defeat."¹⁰⁵ This cry of indignation took plenty of time before it burst forth; Bishop de Pontbriand did not speak of assassination until 1756, the *Précis des faits* came in 1756, Chevrier's poem was in 1758, and Thomas's poem in 1759. And it should not be thought that this cry of indignation was unanimous. The Journal of the Chevalier de Lévis has this significant phrase: "Our enterprise on the Ohio gave rise to the pretended assassination of M. de Jumonville."¹⁰⁶ Lévis did not arrive in Canada until two years after the affair, and just at the time when national policy was beginning to exploit the event on May 28, 1754. As for Pouchot, who arrived in Canada in 1755, became commander of Fort Niagara in 1756, and compiled his memoirs after his return to France, he went much farther than Lévis: "The English officer, warned of the coming of this detachment by his Indian allies, went to watch for it in a sort of ambush. Jumonville, seeing then that he was not the stronger, tried to show the letter he bore. The English, who did not want to be compromised by negotiations, fired a volley at the detachment, killed Jumonville and some others, and took the rest prisoners."¹⁰⁷ Neither Pouchot nor Lévis were direct witnesses, but their evidence serves at least to show that contemporary Frenchmen were not unanimous about the Jumonville affair.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, v.

¹⁰⁵ Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, *Les Anciens Canadiens* (Quebec, Desbarats et Derbshire, 1863).

¹⁰⁶ *Journal des campagnes du Chevalier de Lévis en Canada de 1756 à 1760* (Montreal, Beauchemin, 1889), 37.

¹⁰⁷ *Mémoires sur la dernière guerre de l'Amérique septentrionale . . .* par M. Pouchot (Yverdon, M. DCC. LXXXI.), I, 14. These memoirs were not published until 1781, but most have been written about 1768 (xxv).

CONCLUSION

From all this what conclusion can be reached? On one side, the French claimed the Ohio valley and undertook the military occupation of this disputed region without waiting for the commissioners' decision. They pushed the English back as far as possible without knowing the exact limits of the territory they claimed. On the other side, the English also thought themselves the legitimate proprietors of this region. They entered it with armed forces, were driven away from a fort they were building, and then returned to try again. On the way they heard that a party of Frenchmen were advancing against them, they looked for this party which was behaving secretly, and they finally found it hidden in an obscure ravine, half a mile from the road. Washington was used to the idea of surprise attacks, and had good reason to be on his guard. Therefore, he fell upon the French and slew them.

Was Monceau right in saying that Jumonville began to read the summons? He was present only at the beginning of the skirmish. Was Drouillon right in saying that the interpréter called out to Washington for a conference? He was looking for arguments to support his diplomatic status. Was Washington right in saying that nothing of the sort happened? His testimony cannot be dismissed merely because he was defending himself, and it must be remembered that Monceau and Drouillon did not tell the same story. There was no official inquiry, but only official charges. Without verifying the evidence, Duquesne made the charge of assassination and called for revenge. At first, the French Court counselled moderation, but in 1756 when war was declared, the *Précis des faits* tried to use the Jumonville affair to blacken England. The unfair methods of the *Précis*, its erroneous information and mutilation of texts, have been made evident. Just like England, the *Précis* had much to hide.

Many French historians have unfortunately seen fit to accept the official version in the *Précis des faits* without verifying anything. They begin with the principle that the Ohio valley belonged evidently and incontestably to France, and fit the evidence together in the same way as the *Précis* to arrive at the same rigorous sentence: *Washington committed an assassination*. Now, eighteenth-century historians might be in the service of Choiseul,

later historians might feel obliged to take the French side, but present-day historians have no right whatever to take sides, in the light of modern historical method. They ought to verify all the facts painstakingly without political or national bias. If there is doubt, they ought to express the doubt, and it has been shown that it is not easy to establish the essential facts in the Jumonville affair. The charge of assassination is a very serious charge, and no historian has a right to make it against anyone without very positive proof. Considering the way all the direct evidence contradicts itself, with all the confusion involved in the Jumonville drama, an honest historian cannot use the word *assassination*, and in this he follows the practice of several contemporary French historians, among others the historian Lavissee, who writes of Jumonville: "Killed in an engagement, and not assassinated, as has been claimed incorrectly for too long a time."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *Le XVIII^e siècle, 1715-1788* (Paris, Librairie Colin, 1896), 529, note 1; Volume VII of *Histoire générale du II^e siècle à nos jours*, edited by Ernest Lavissee and Alfred Rambaud.



FORT NECESSITY

View of the 1953-54 restoration of the stockade and embankments from the southwest, the direction from which the French attack began.

Courtesy National Parks Service

